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LETTER

FROM AN

IGNORAMUS

TO HIS

CORRESPONDENT.

December 6th. 1682.

Honoured Sir!

I Make no doubt, but you have the News of the Commitment of Mr. John Wilmer, Citizen and Common-Council-man of London, to the Tower, among others; and no less Crime laid to his charge than High Treason, for conspiring the Death of the King, and to deprive him of his Imperial Crown and Dignity, which are the Words specified in the Warrant directed to the Lieutenant of the Tower; where he was confined close for near six weeks, and suffered not to see or speak to any Friend or Relation, other than his Wife; who with great Labour and Trouble obtained the favour to be confined with him. After the time abovesaid, by Friends Liberty was obtain'd for him to walk in the Tower for his Healths sake; and in that state he was farther a Prisoner nine weeks odd days, which makes in all fifteen weeks; during which time he was not permitted the use of Pen, Ink, or Paper: at the end of which, he with others was by *Habes Corpus* carried up to the Kings Bench, and there was admitted to Bail, to appear the next Term; his Bail and himself entering into a Recognizance of 9000*l*. In all this time there hath not been the least Prosecution, neither saw he, or knows any person that hath sworn against him. The day he was taken up, he had a violent Ague and Fever upon him, which seized him near a week before; but on the day of his caption, a *vehement vomiting and looseness* also seized him to such a degree, that his Apothecary and Friends about him, did dispend of his Life. In this Condition he had notice, near an hour before the Messengers came to his house, that they were waiting for him; so that with help of Friends, he got on his Cloaths, and his Vomiting and Looseness left him; yet so weak, that his Friends concluded him in great Danger of his Life, as he was; but if the Messengers removed him, they concluded it would certainly destroy him. And notwithstanding his Apothecary would have made Oath of this before a Magistrate; yet nothing would avail, but away they hurried him into a Coach near *Charing-Cross*, to the Messengers house, one Mr. *Atterbury's*, where

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he was kept from that afternoon (which was *Saturday*) until *Monday* morning; and then was hurried to *Hampton-Court*, where the Council sat; and without seeing the face of any Accuser, was by Warrant from the Council, committed to the Tower, where he lay as abovesaid; and notwithstanding his illness, could not be admitted in fourteen days time after, in the Tower, to have either Doctor or Apothecary to come to him; but God who is always good, was very Gracious to him, and was better than all Means and Helps; for he healed him, and helped him up, even to a Miracle.

Thus have I given you in brief, the state of his Case hitherto; now it's possible, being at this distance, you may be desirous to know the Reason of this Imprisonment; for the old Proverb is, There is no smoke, but there is some fire; but I may truly say, this Proverb doth not always hold true; I am sure it doth not in his Case, as I have often heard him say, and will be proved as far as Negatives can prove it, if ever it comes to that. I shall as briefly as I can, give you the Conjectures of the Town, both as to his Confinement, and the rest of the *Protestants*. A more certain account you may expect, when we have a Parliament, and not until then; and when that will be, God and the King only knoweth.

The Common Enemy to all *Protestants* (the *Papists*) you know, are always at work to bring about our Ruine and Confusion; and they have ever since the Reformation been contriving of it; but God hath hitherto disappointed them, and I trust he will still. But since the plain Discovery of their General Plot in 1678. which hath been owned by the King, and four successive Parliaments, and so many of the Party taken into Custody, and some executed, and most of the rest being by the Parliament looked upon as Confederates with them: They looked upon themselves as quite lost; and the most favour they could expect, was to have Liberty to stay here with the loss of their Estates; and some of the chief Heads of them to suffer as Traytors, and so be utterly incapacitated to disturb the Government any more. But the Jesuits their chief Councillors and Politicians, were loth to give up so fair a Game; therefore presently they let their Wits to work to prevent the further Discovery of this their Real Plot, by forging Sham-Plots; of which by their means, and the Devils helping of them, we have had of one kind or another, I think, no less than a dozen; and I think this their last was more dangerous to us of this Nation, than all the rest; and I take this last to be thus: That their Design was laid two ways, that either might serve their turn. The Plot by them laid, was to be a *Protestant Plot*; and the persons to carry it on, and be engaged in it, was this City, and the last House of Commons at *Oxford*. The matter to be sworn what these were engaged to do, was, That if the King would not pass such Acts as they would have him, then that they should seize upon his Person, and keep him in Custody until such time as he should do it. The Witnesses to prove this Plot, are some of the same, both *English* and *Irish*, that proved the *Papish Plot*; which by their great poverty with frowns here, and not seeing any likelihood of a Parliament, have by the working of the Jesuits, and their Friends, been suborned to retract their Evidence of the *Papish Plot*, and to swear this *Protestant Plot*; which if it took effect, they doubted not, but at least to gain an Act of Oblivion, if it did not gain their first purpose, even to do all their Work. Now they bring their Plot on the Stage, and first swear against my Lord *Howard of Eserick*, and he is committed to the Tower; the next against my Lord *Shaftsbury*, as the head of the Party; then against one *Stephen Colledge*; after him, *John Rowse* and *Edward Whitaker*; all these were committed to the Tower.

It was now time to begin Prosecution of some of these, to see what Execution that would do, before any further Attempt should be made in taking up more. The first they begun with, was my Lord *Howard of Eserick*, and preferred an Indictment against him before a Grand Jury of *Middlesex*, the Jury consisting of nineteen; the Witnesses to swear against him, were Mrs. *Fitzbarris*, the Wife of *Edward Fitzbarris*, (a grand *Irish Papist*, and then under Condemnation for High Treason) and Mrs. *Fitzbarris* her Maid, or Strumpet, going by the name of *Terrésia Peacock*. These swore, as I am informed, much to the heads as above.

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There were brought in to close the business, two persons more; but they swore nothing of significance; but upon the cros interrogating them, the Jury found out the falsity of their Testimony; so that upon their Debates, fifteen of the nineteen were for bringing in the Bill *Ignoramus*. But in regard the Foreman, Sir Charles Lee, with the other, did not agree, they deferred the further Debate of it until the morrow, when they were to give in their Bills and Presentments to the Kings Bench, being the last day of the Term; but the Clerk, that attended them with some others, got the Bill away before it was signed and made a Record, that the morrow the Jury could not have it; whereupon they made their Complaints to the Judges, and gave in their verbal Judgment of the said Indictment to be *Ignoramus*, and desired it might be recorded; so was an end of that Term, and no further prosecution against my Lord Howard then, nor since.

The next attempt was against Stephen Colledge, called the Protestant Joyner, by preferring a Bill of Indictment against him for a Plot, and High Treason, as in manner aforesaid, at the General Quarter Sessions of Peace and Goal-delivery for London and Middlesex, at the Old Baily. The said Bill being presented to the Grand Jury for the City, where were nineteen persons, whereof John Wisner was Foreman; to this Indictment there comes a great number of Witnesses, at least six: and these must give their testimony in open Court; and it's believed the Design was thereby to awe the Jury, and if possible, to lay on them a necessity to find the Bill; in regard the number of Witnesses was great, and the things they swore were so dreadful to most of the Auditors, that it was feared they would have sworn the house upon our heads. But after the Jury had heard them in Court, and went into their Chamber and called in the Witnesses one by one, and cros examined them, they had such sufficient satisfaction, that upon the Debate the whole nineteen agreed in Judgment to bring in the Bill *Ignoramus*.

This greatly madded the Popish party and the Witnesses, of some of their Gang; to make the Foreman amends for his former kindness to them, and to stop the publishing at Oxford his knowledg of them, and of their Design, which they acquainted him with; and in revenge for his being an *Ignoramus*-man, as the *Papists* call him, and all the rest of the Jurors, they now swear Treason against him, whereby he is committed to the Tower, and lyeth as aforesaid, so that he is prevented from further doing them mischief in hindring them from going on in their Design. Afterwards they go down to Oxford, where a Jury is pitched upon to find the second Bill against Colledge, for words, but not a Plot. For your full information in that Affair, I refer you to Colledge's Tryal. Since his death, hath a Bill been preferred at the Old Baily, against John Rowse, who they would pretend was to be a kind of Paymaster in this Protestant Plot; but this Rowse, though it may be an honest man, is a person of mean account for so great a Character as that. Many Witnesses swore against him, I think about eight, and were all examined in open Court, and cros-examined there also, a thing not known in our days, and believe are few presidents of like nature in former Ages; but upon the whole, the Jury acquitted themselves to their own satisfaction, as to bring in the Bill *Ignoramus*, which was also to the satisfaction of the greatest part of the Court; so Rowse upon the last day of the Sessions, was admitted to bail, and discharged the next. The Foreman of this Jury, was Deputy Denew. Now the next, a Bill of Indictment was presented against my Lord Shaftsbury upon a special Commission to the City and County, and brought in before the Grand Jury for the aforesaid City, where were about such a parcel of Witnesses as against Rowse; and were all examined, and cros-examined in open Court. The Jury were of the most eminent Citizens of London; four of them were members in the last Parliament: the Foreman was Sir Samuel Barnadison, Knight; and this Bill also was brought in *Ignoramus*; and for your further satisfaction why they did so in this matter, I refer you to the printed Narrative of the Examination of the Witnesses by the Jury, which I doubt not, but you have seen. And thus far have the *Papists* laboured to Deget a Protestant Plot, had the first or second Jury found the Bill, so that the Witnesses had been passed for *Boni & Legales Homines*.

God knows where it had stopped ; but now as they have failed in a *Protestant Plot*, they hope they have gained the other point of Shamming the *Papish Plot*, by invalidating the testimony of so many Witnesses as swore the *Papish Plot*, before we believed them ; now to swear a *Protestant* one, without being believed. By which means they hope neither these, nor any of the rest as have sworn a *Papish Plot*, should be credited against them, seeing we will not believe a Plot contrived by our selves against our selves, and know not of our selves ; and the Papists, our dear friends, were so kind to find it out for us ; so that now we must leave the further Examination of both one and the other, to a Parliament ; and the Papists hope they have so ordered Matters, as not to need to fear a Parliament for some time ; but now having failed in their Protestant Plot, to go to their old Game again, and find out some other trick to do the Feat with ; and most thinking men are of the Judgment, their next work (seeing their Shams will not do) will be to set the *Protestants* together by the ears among themselves, Conformist against Nonconformist, like two Dogs fighting for a bone, that we may be weakened thereby, and then they to strike in on one side, and destroy us at once by the help and assistance of the *French King* ; who only waiteth for, and wanteth such an opportunity. But I hope God will give us more Christian Wisdom, than to expose our selves to the mercy of the *French*, though the Most Christian King ; and for all the tugging and struggling of the Papists, to keep off the day of Judgment, as they look upon a Parliament to be. God can incline the heart of the King to call one sooner than they may desire. Thus, as brief as I can, I have given you the sum and substance of our Friend's being in the Tower, and the Worlds Reasons for it ; and I believe, for matter of Fact, it is very near the truth. God send my next may bring you the Good News of our King and his Parliament meeting lovingly together, that all Faults may be mended, and the Nation happily settled, is the hearty desire of him that truly loves his King and Country, and as far as shall consist with their welfare, is Yours to command,

W. J.

LONDON: Printed for Richard Janeway in Queens-head-Alley in Pater-noster-Kow. 1682.